

What is claimed is:

1. An apparatus for outputting an image by generating at least one of a print, a print proof, a printing plate, and a platemaking film directly from image data including at least one color element, comprising:

preparing means for preparing a plurality of gradation conversion curves whose gradation characteristics are different stepwise from each other;

selecting means for selecting one of said gradation conversion curves with respect to at least one color element; and

gradation converting means for being supplied with image data, converting gradations of the supplied image data according to the selected gradation conversion curve, and outputting image data represented by the image data with the corrected gradations.

2. An apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said preparing means comprises storing means for storing the gradation conversion curves whose gradation characteristics are different stepwise from each other.

3. An apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said preparing means comprises generating means for generating the gradation conversion curves whose gradation characteristics are different stepwise from each other.

4. An apparatus according to claim 1, wherein each of said gradation conversion curves has gradation changes which correspond to exposure levels in a contact exposure process for producing printing plates.

5. An apparatus according to claim 4, wherein each of said gradation conversion curves which has the gradation changes which correspond to said exposure levels is indicated by a title corresponding to one of the exposure levels.

6. An apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said gradation conversion curves whose gradation characteristics are different stepwise from each other comprise a plurality of gradation conversion curves whose gradation characteristics are different stepwise from each other only in a highlight area, a middle-tone area, or a shadow area.

7. An apparatus according to claim 2, further comprising:

gradation conversion curve generating/correcting means for newly generating or correcting said gradation conversion curves.

8. An apparatus according to claim 1, further comprising:

display means for simultaneously displaying said grada-

tion conversion curves.

5 9. A method of outputting an image by generating at least one of a print, a print proof, a printing plate, and a platemaking film directly from image data including at least one color element, comprising the steps of:

preparing a plurality of gradation conversion curves whose gradation characteristics are different stepwise from each other;

10 selecting one of said gradation conversion curves with respect to at least one color element; and

15 converting gradations of supplied image data according to the selected gradation conversion curve, and outputting image data represented by the image data with the corrected gradations.

20 10. A method according to claim 9, wherein said step of preparing comprises the step of:

storing the gradation conversion curves whose gradation characteristics are different stepwise from each other.

25 11. A method according to claim 9, wherein said step of preparing comprises the step of:

generating the gradation conversion curves whose gradation characteristics are different stepwise from each other.

12. A method according to claim 9, wherein each of said

gradation conversion curves has gradation changes which correspond to exposure levels in a contact exposure process for producing printing plates.

5           13. A method according to claim 12, wherein each of said gradation conversion curves which has the gradation changes which correspond to said exposure levels is indicated by a title corresponding to one of the exposure levels.

002115           14. A method according to claim 9, wherein said gradation conversion curves whose gradation characteristics are different stepwise from each other comprise a plurality of gradation conversion curves whose gradation characteristics are different stepwise from each other only in a highlight area, a middle-tone area, or a shadow area.